

Chapter 8

Nonverbal Intercultural Communication

Learning to communicate as a native member of a culture involves knowing both the verbal and the nonverbal code systems that are used. The verbal code system constitutes only a portion of the messages that people exchange when they communicate. In this chapter, we explain the types of messages that are often regarded as more foundational or more elemental to human communication. Taken together, these messages constitute the nonverbal communication system.

Whereas verbal codes are language-based, nonverbal codes are not. **Nonverbal codes** encompass the ways that people communicate without words, and they include all forms of communication other than linguistic ones.

The importance of nonverbal codes in communication has been well established. Nonverbal behaviors can become part of the communication process when someone intentionally tries to convey a message or when someone attributes meaning to the nonverbal behaviors of another, whether or not the person intended to communicate a particular meaning.

An important caution related to the distinction between nonverbal and verbal communication must be made as you learn about nonverbal code systems. Though we describe the communication of verbal and nonverbal messages in separate chapters for explanatory convenience, it would be a mistake to assume that they are actually separate and independent communication systems.¹ In fact, they are inseparably linked together to form the code systems through which the members of a culture convey their beliefs, values, thoughts, feelings, and intentions to one another. Thus, our distinction between verbal and nonverbal messages is a convenient, but perhaps misleading, way to sensitize you to the communication exchanges within and between cultures.

Nonverbal codes have several characteristics that make them different from verbal codes:

- Unlike verbal communication, nonverbal communication is multichanneled; this means that nonverbal messages can occur in a variety of ways simultaneously.

- Nonverbal codes are also multifunctional. As we will elaborate shortly, nonverbal codes can fulfill several goals or communicative functions simultaneously.
- Moreover, nonverbal codes are typically enacted spontaneously and subconsciously, and oftentimes they convey their meanings in subtle and covert ways.² People process nonverbal messages, both the sending and receiving of them, with less awareness than they process verbal messages.
- Contributing to the silent character of nonverbal messages is the fact that most of them are continuous and natural, and they tend to blur into one another. For example, raising one's hand to wave good-bye is a gesture made up of multiple muscular movements, yet it is interpreted as one continuous movement.

Unlike verbal communication systems, however, there are no dictionaries or formal sets of rules to provide a systematic list of the meanings of a culture's nonverbal code systems. The meanings of nonverbal messages are usually less precise than are those of verbal codes. It is difficult, for example, to define precisely the meaning of a raised eyebrow in a particular culture. Skill in the use of nonverbal message systems has only recently begun to receive formal attention in the educational process, a reflection of the out-of-awareness character of nonverbal codes.

8.1: Cultural Universals in Nonverbal Communication

This chapter will introduce you to nonverbal communication behaviors that cut across and transcend culture.



By the end of this module, you will be able to:

- 8.1.1: Identify nonverbal communication behaviors that are culturally universal**

8.1.1: Culturally Universal Nonverbal Communication

OBJECTIVE: Identify nonverbal communication behaviors that are culturally universal

While many nonverbal codes are specific to a particular culture, others are universal.

Although some aspects of nonverbal code systems are universal, it is also clear that cultures choose to express emotions and territoriality in differing ways. These variations are of particular interest in intercultural communication.

WRITING PROMPT

Reflecting on Cultural Universals in Nonverbal Communication

In reflecting upon your nonverbal communication, how might this knowledge of cultural universals help you build more connections across cultures? Explain whether such knowledge motivates you to

Universal Aspects of Nonverbal Communication

Research illustrates that certain expressions, gestures, and cues transcend cultural boundaries, including nonverbal displays,³ facial expressions,⁴ emotional displays,⁵ territoriality,⁶ and communication characteristics.⁷

interact more with culturally different groups or to explore nonverbal communication behaviors that are more culturally specific.

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8.2: Cultural Variations in Nonverbal Communication

Many instances of nonverbal communication can be interpreted only within the framework of the culture in which they occur. Cultures vary in their nonverbal behaviors in three ways (Figure 8.1). First, cultures differ in the specific repertoire of behaviors that are enacted. Second, display

Interactive

Nonverbal Displays

Charles Darwin believed that certain nonverbal displays are universal. The shoulder shrug, for example, is used to convey such messages as "I can't do it," "I can't stop it from happening," "It wasn't my fault," "Be patient," and "I do not intend to resist." Many hand gestures (such as pointing) and vocal characteristics (such as the intonation patterns of sentences) are cultural universals as well. Even children who are blind from birth use many of the same gestures and emotional expressions as sighted children do, which suggests their universality.

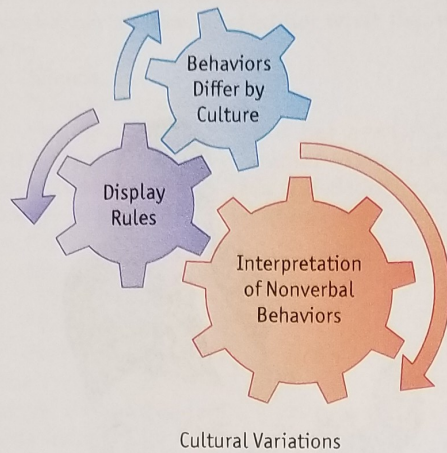
Facial Expressions

Emotional Displays

Territoriality

Communication Characteristics

Figure 8.1 Cultural Variations in Nonverbal Communication



rules differ by culture. Finally, cultures attribute different meanings to particular nonverbal behaviors.

By the end of this module, you will be able to:

- 8.2.1:** Identify nonverbal communication behaviors that vary by culture
- 8.2.2:** Describe how display rules may vary from culture to culture
- 8.2.3:** Explain how nonverbal behaviors may be interpreted differently from culture to culture

8.2.1: Behaviors Differ by Culture

OBJECTIVE: Identify nonverbal communication behaviors that vary by culture

Certain movements, body positions, postures, vocal intonations, gestures, spatial requirements, and even dances and ritualized actions are specific to a particular culture. Consider, for example, how a culture might use nonverbal messages to say “hello” to someone: shaking hands, bowing, a head nod, or many other possibilities. Similarly, think about “expected” conversational standing distances, or the ritualized movements in the hula, or the performance of the server in a Japanese tea ceremony. Such messages are all expressed by behaviors that are culturally specific.

8.2.2: Display Rules

OBJECTIVE: Describe how display rules may vary from culture to culture

All cultures have **display rules** that govern when and under what circumstances various nonverbal expressions are required, preferred, permitted, or prohibited. Thus,

children learn both how to communicate nonverbally and the appropriate display rules that govern their nonverbal expressions. Display rules indicate such things as how far apart people should stand while talking, whom to touch and where, the speed and timing of movements and gestures, when to look directly at others in a conversation and when to look away, whether loud talking and expansive gestures or quietness and controlled movements should be used, when to smile and when to frown, and the overall pacing of communication.

The norms for display rules vary greatly across cultures.⁸ Latinos and European Americans, for instance, differ substantially in their use of eye contact during family conversations. Compared to European Americans, fathers and children in Latino families gaze at one another less, and Latino mothers and sons (but not mothers and daughters) are less likely to look at one another as well.⁹ These Latino display rules are based on a cultural value of *respeto*, or respect, which is important in that culture for maintaining cordial relationships.¹⁰

Culture Connections

Willie Wassillie was more Yupik than Lucy, short, bow-legged, thick chested, with a broad brown face, black hair in a buzz cut that hadn't changed since he'd gotten out of the marines, and a gaze that seldom met Liam's own, so he couldn't tell what color the eyes were. He would have been raised to believe that that was rude, and unlike Lucy, he spoke little, another village trait.

—Dana Stabenow

Cultural differences in nonverbal display rules are certainly not confined to U.S. cultures. The use of eye contact during conversations, for example, is more common among Italians and the British than it is among Japanese and Chinese.¹¹ Similarly, U.S. pedestrians are more likely than their Japanese counterparts to make eye contact, smile, and nonverbally greet other pedestrians.¹² Even photographs that people attach online to their instant messaging (IM) sites differ across cultures: IM users from Eastern Europe are less likely to smile than IM users from Western Europe.¹³

Such differences in display rules can cause discomfort and misinterpretations. To illustrate, consider a Vietnamese woman named Hoa who is visiting her cousin in the United States:

As Hoa arrives, her cousin Phuong and some of his American friends are waiting at the airport to greet her. Hoa and Phuong are both excited about their meeting because they have been separated for seven years. As

soon as Hoa enters the passenger terminal, Phuong introduces her to his friends, Tom, Don, and Charles. Tom steps forward and hugs and kisses Hoa. She pushes him away and bursts into tears.¹⁴

The difference in when, where, and whom it is acceptable to kiss was the source of the discomfort for Hoa; in her culture's display rules, it is an insult for a boy to hug and kiss a girl in public.

Display rules also indicate the intensity of the behavior that is acceptable. In showing grief or intense sadness, for instance, people from southern Mediterranean cultures may tend to exaggerate or amplify their displays, European Americans may try to remain calm and somewhat neutral, the British may understate their emotional displays by showing only a little of their inner feelings, and the Japanese and Thai may attempt to mask their sorrow completely by covering it with smiling and laughter.¹⁵

8.2.3: Interpretations of Nonverbal Behaviors

OBJECTIVE: Explain how nonverbal behaviors may be interpreted differently from culture to culture

Cultures differ in the interpretations, or meanings, that are attributed to particular nonverbal behaviors. Three possible interpretations could be imposed on a given instance of nonverbal behavior: it is random, it is idiosyncratic, or it is shared.¹⁶

- An interpretation that the behavior is random means that it has no particular meaning to anyone.
- An idiosyncratic interpretation suggests that the behaviors are unique to special individuals or relationships, and they therefore have particular meanings only to these people. For example, family members often recognize that certain unique behaviors of a person signify a specific emotional state. Thus, a family member who tugs on her ear may indicate, to other family members, that she is about to explode in anger.
- The third interpretation is that the behaviors have shared meaning and significance, as when a group of people jointly attribute the same meaning to a particular nonverbal act.

However, cultures differ in what they regard as random, idiosyncratic, and shared. Thus, behaviors that are regarded as random in one culture may have shared significance in another. For example, when a British professor in Cairo inadvertently showed the soles of his shoes to his class while leaning back in his chair, the Egyptian students were very insulted.¹⁷ The professor's random behavior of leaning back and allowing the soles of his shoes to be seen



Behaviors that are insignificant in one culture may be very meaningful in another. This woman relaxes and shows the soles of her feet to others. In many cultures, this would be regarded as an insult.

was a nonverbal behavior with the shared meaning of insult in Egyptian culture. Such differences in how cultures define behaviors as random, idiosyncratic, or shared can lead to problems in intercultural communication; if one culture defines a particular behavior as random, that behavior will probably be ignored when someone from a different culture uses it to communicate what is assumed to be shared meanings.

Even nonverbal behaviors that have shared significance in each of two cultures may mean something different to their members. As Ray Birdwhistell suggested, "A smile in one society portrays friendliness, in another embarrassment, and in still another [it] may contain a warning that unless tension is reduced, hostility and attack will follow."¹⁸ U.S. Americans typically associate the smile with happiness or friendliness. To the Japanese, the smile can convey a much wider range of emotions, including happiness, agreement, sadness, embarrassment, and disagreement. And though the Thais smile a lot, Koreans rarely smile and regard those who do as superficial.

Culture Connections

A patter of footsteps announced my first customer—a skinny little girl, maybe four years old, with long black hair and a runny nose. She regarded the strange *naluqmiu* before her with

alarm. When I smiled, she steadied herself and solemnly laid a grubby handful of change on the counter, still eyeing me warily. In my best storekeeper's voice, I asked her what she needed today.

Silence.

"Candy?" I prompted.

She didn't answer, but her eyes widened at the array behind the counter—cases of Milky Ways, Twizzlers, Drax Snax, LifeSavers, Garbage Candy—at least twenty varieties.

"Which one?"

More wide-eyed silence.

"This one?" ...

"What about this one?"

Finally in exasperation I laid a Drax Snax and some Twizzlers on the counter and sorted out her change. With an expression of complete ecstasy the pretty little girl opened her mouth ...

It took me a couple weeks to figure out that she'd been talking to me all along. The Inupiat are subtle, quiet people, and much of their communication hinges on nonverbal cues. Raising the eyebrows or widening the eyes means yes; a wrinkled nose is a negative. The poor girl had been shouting at me, "Yes! Yes! YES!" All these years later, I still recall that first simple failure to understand; it reminds me of all my failures since then, and of the distance that remains.

—Nick Jans

Nonverbal repertoires, their corresponding display rules, and their preferred interpretations are not taught verbally. Rather, they are learned directly through observation and personal experience in a culture. Because they are frequently acquired outside of conscious awareness, they are rarely questioned or challenged by their users and are often noticed only when they are violated. In intercultural communication, therefore, misunderstandings often occur in the interpretations of nonverbal behaviors because different display rules create different meanings about the appropriateness and effectiveness of particular interaction sequences. Consider, for instance, the following example:

An American college student, while having a dinner party with a group of foreigners, learns that her favorite cousin has just died. She bites her lip, pulls herself up, and politely excuses herself from the group. The interpretation given to this behavior will vary with the culture of the observer. The Italian student thinks, "How insincere; she doesn't even cry." The Russian student thinks, "How unfriendly; she didn't care enough to share her grief with her friends." The fellow American student thinks, "How brave; she wanted to bear her burden by herself."¹⁹

As you can see, cultural variations in nonverbal communication alter the behaviors that are displayed, the meanings that are imposed on those behaviors, and the interpretations of the messages.

WRITING PROMPT

Cultural Variations in Your Life

Reflect on the types of nonverbal communication behaviors that are important and meaningful in your culture, and describe them. How might these nonverbal communication behaviors be less meaningful in other cultures? Suggest reasons why this might be so.

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8.3: Nonverbal Functions in Intercultural Communication

Before we discuss specific nonverbal codes, let us first consider the following question: What does nonverbal communication *do*? That is, what are the functions of nonverbal communication? Functions are the purposes, meanings, motives, reasons, or goals of communication. As Miles Patterson suggests, "nonverbal communication is best understood as a coordinated system that facilitates adaptive, interpersonal goals."²⁰

✓ By the end of this module, you will be able to:

8.3.1: Summarize the purposes of nonverbal messages in intercultural communication

8.3.1: The Role of Nonverbal Communication

OBJECTIVE: Summarize the purposes of nonverbal messages in intercultural communication

Nonverbal codes can be used to fulfill five functions: provide information, manage impressions, express emotions, regulate interactions, and convey relationship messages (Figure 8.2).²¹

WRITING PROMPT

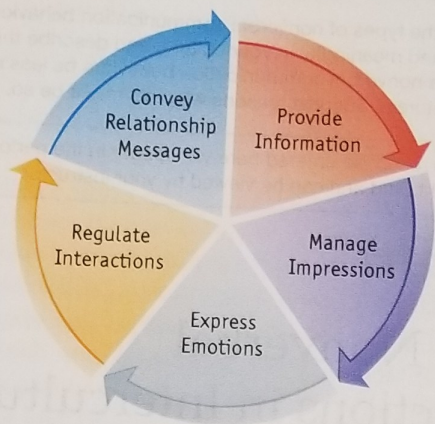
Your Observations about Nonverbal Codes

After reflecting on the five functions of nonverbal codes, think about the intercultural interactions in which you have engaged. What have you noticed about how you use nonverbal communication behaviors? Explain which of the five functions seem to drive your nonverbal behaviors. Also describe any other functions, perhaps not discussed in the text, that affect to your interactions.

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Figure 8.2 Five Functions of Nonverbal Communications



8.4: Nonverbal Messages in Intercultural Communication

Messages are transmitted between people over some sort of channel. Unlike written or spoken words, however, nonverbal communication can occur in multiple channels simultaneously. Thus, several types of nonverbal messages can be generated by a single speaker or listener at any given instant. When you “read” or observe the nonverbal behaviors of others, you might notice how they appear, what they wear, where they look, how they move, the characteristics of their voice, and how they orient themselves in space and time. All of these nonverbal codes use particular channels or

Five Functions of Nonverbal Communication

The five functions of nonverbal communication are interrelated; multiple goals are usually being accomplished during every interaction. For ease of explanation, we discuss these functions as though they are separate and independent. Please remember, however, that multiple functions—indeed, often all of them—can be fulfilled simultaneously.²²

Interactive

Provide Information

One function served by nonverbal communication is that of providing information. This function is similar to a primary function of verbal communication. The difference, of course, is in the kinds of information that can be conveyed by nonverbal and verbal codes. Nonverbal codes are most useful to convey global meanings and emotional information; verbal codes are most useful to convey logical and factual information. The old saying that “A picture is worth a thousand words” underscores this holistic emphasis that nonverbal codes can provide.

Manage Impressions

Express Emotions

Regulate Interactions

Convey Relationship Messages

means of communicating messages, which are usually interpreted in a similar fashion by members of a given culture.

Culture Connections

No discovery pleased me more, on that first excursion from the city, than the full translation of the famous Indian head-wiggle. The weeks I'd spent in Bombay with Prabaker had taught me that the shaking or wiggling of the head from side to side—that most characteristic of Indian expressive gestures—was the equivalent of a forward nod of the head, meaning *Yes*. I'd also discerned the subtler senses of *I agree with you*, and *Yes, I would like that*. What I learned, on the train, was that a universal message attached to the gesture, when it was used as a greeting, which made it uniquely useful.

Most of those who entered the open carriage greeted the other seated or standing men with a little wiggle of the head. The gesture always drew a reciprocal wag of the head from at least one, and sometimes several of the passengers. I watched it happen at station after station, knowing that the newcomers couldn't be indicating *Yes*, or *I agree with you* with the head-wiggle because nothing had been said, and there was no exchange other than the gesture itself. Gradually, I realised that the wiggle of the head was a signal to others that carried an amiable and disarming message: *I'm a peaceful man. I don't mean any harm*.

Moved by admiration and no small envy for the marvellous gesture, I resolved to try it myself. The train stopped at a small rural station. A stranger joined our group in the carriage. When our eyes met for the first time, I gave the little wiggle of my head, and a smile. The result was astounding. The man beamed a smile at me so huge that it was half the brilliance of Prabaker's own, and set to such energetic head wagging in return that I was, at first, a little alarmed. By journey's end, however, I'd had enough practice to perform the movement as casually as others in the carriage did, and to convey the gentle message of the gesture. It was the first truly Indian expression my body learned, and it was the beginning of a transformation that has ruled my life, in all the long years since that journey of crowded hearts.

—Gregory David Roberts

We will discuss several types of nonverbal codes to demonstrate their importance in understanding how members of a culture attempt to understand, organize, and interpret the behaviors of others. We will first consider nonverbal codes that are relatively static and unchanging within communication interactions: the physical attributes of people's bodies and the environment and artifacts—the setting—within which communication occurs. Then we focus on nonverbal codes that are dynamic and can change

during interactions: body movements, personal space, touching, and characteristics of the voice. We conclude this section with an examination of cultural differences in time usage, which includes both static and dynamic features.

By the end of this module, you will be able to:

- 8.4.1: Describe how physical appearance sends nonverbal messages
- 8.4.2: Describe how an environment shapes nonverbal messages
- 8.4.3: Explain how body language sends nonverbal messages
- 8.4.4: Describe how the use of personal space and territory can communicate specific meanings
- 8.4.5: Explain how touch can be used to communicate nonverbally
- 8.4.6: Describe how nonverbal messages are communicated through vocal quality and vocalics
- 8.4.7: Summarize how the varying use of time among cultures affects intercultural communication

8.4.1: Physical Appearance

OBJECTIVE: Describe how physical appearance sends nonverbal messages

When you first see someone, even before you interact with that person, what do you notice? A likely answer is that you observe, at least in part, the person's physical attributes or physical appearance. Some aspects of a person's physical appearance, such as the actual body characteristics, are relatively permanent; they are stable features that are regarded as an inherent part of that person. Included in this list are one's body shape, body size, body type, facial features, height, weight, skin color, eye color, and various qualities that denote age and gender. Other aspects of one's physical appearance involve body modifications such as piercings, tattoos, and cosmetic procedures that are also relatively permanent. Finally, some aspects of one's physical appearance can and usually do change from one situation to another, but they usually don't change within a specific interaction. These body adornments may include one's clothing, makeup, jewelry, glasses, hair characteristics, and body scents both natural (such as from sweat) and artificial (such as from perfumes and colognes).

Culture Connections

White was the colour of death and mourning; it was the only colour my mother wore apart from grey.

—Gurjinder Basran

Physical appearance becomes a nonverbal code when it creates shared meanings among individuals. For example, clothing and body decorations can be, and often are, intentionally used to shape others' understanding of one's personal identity, cultural identity, social affiliations, preferences, moods, status, attractiveness, relationships, and other aspects of oneself. Clothing styles may also fulfill the culture's needs for modesty, self-expression, or privacy.

Sometimes there are large and obvious differences in physical appearance across cultural, ethnic, and racial groups. Both cultural identities and cultural biases are often based on these differences. Conversely, similarities in these physical attributes can be used to identify fellow ingroup members.

Cultural standards for beauty and attractiveness vary greatly, as do expectations about how people should look and smell. People have distinct scents that can be affected by their way of living, food preferences, habits, and environment. These differences are often used to make judgments or

interpretations about members of a culture. For instance, most meat-eating Westerners have a distinct body odor that may be unpleasant to cultures that do not consume red meat. Similarly, many hotels in Malaysia have posted signs that say "No Durians" to discourage their guests from eating the pungent, sweet-tasting fruit that many consider to be a delicacy. Among many Arabic-speaking cultures, attempts to mask body odors with perfumes is sometimes considered an insult; for both Arabs and Filipinos, smelling another person's breath may be so favorably regarded that close spatial distances in conversations are used to obtain that smell.

8.4.2: Environment

OBJECTIVE: Describe how an environment shapes nonverbal messages

Another nonverbal code that does not change during a specific interaction is the environment, which encompasses

Types of Environment

People organize their perceptions of their environments in similar ways. Environments differ in their formality, warmth, privacy, familiarity, constraint, and distance.²³

Interactive

Formality

Warmth

Privacy

Familiarity

Constraint

Distance

Formality refers to the heightened sense of decorum and politeness that some environments seem to require. Informal environments allow you to have a more relaxed and casual demeanor. Like many nonverbal codes, perceptions of formality are specific to a culture and its interpretations. U.S. students taking Spanish lessons in Costa Rica, for example, are sometimes regarded as rude and impolite because they act too casually and informally toward their teacher. Conversely, a Nigerian exchange student at a U.S. university who refers to his teacher as "Madam Professor" is displaying a misunderstanding of U.S. classroom norms for appropriate (in)formality.

the physical features or characteristics of our surroundings. The environment might be a home, a classroom, a store, or a specific outdoor location. Within that environment are the objects, tools, furniture, adornments, lighting, colors, decorations, sounds, and creations that people have put there to influence potential interactions and to send distinctive messages about themselves.

WRITING PROMPT

The Environment for Your Nonverbal Communication Patterns

How do your nonverbal communication behaviors change depending on different aspects of the environment? Describe how certain aspects of the environment influence the nonverbal communication behaviors that you use and display. Provide specific examples.

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8.4.3: Body Movements

OBJECTIVE: Explain how body language sends nonverbal messages

In addition to nonverbal codes that don't change in an interaction, there are many nonverbal messages that do. Perhaps the most researched of these is body movements. The study of body movements, often inaccurately called body language, is known as **kinesics**.²⁴

Kinesic behaviors include gestures, head movements, facial expressions, eye behaviors, and other physical displays that can be used to communicate. Of course, like all other forms of communication, no single type of behavior exists in isolation. Specific body movements can be understood only by taking the person's total behavior into account.

Culture Connections

A classic example, for instance, is the Asian cultural belief that too much eye contact is disrespectful and even confrontational. However, not making eye contact can be misconstrued within the American system as an indication of insincerity or discomfort. Similarly, deference to authority may be likened to timidity or a lack of opinions. Self-effacement suggests indifference or a lack of ambition; avoidance of shame prevents one from publicly acknowledging his or her aspirations for fear of failing; self-control and modesty inhibit one from social interaction and public speaking; and so on.

—Renu Khator

Paul Ekman and Wallace Friesen have suggested that there are five categories of kinesic behaviors: emblems, illustrators, affect displays, regulators, and adaptors.²⁵ We will consider each type of kinesic behavior in turn.

EMBLEMS Emblems are nonverbal behaviors that have a direct verbal counterpart. Emblems that are familiar to most U.S. Americans include such gestures as the two-fingered peace symbol and arm waving to indicate hello or good-bye. Emblems are typically used as a substitute for the verbal channel, either by choice or when the verbal channel is blocked for some reason. Underwater divers, for example, have a rich vocabulary of kinesic behaviors that they use to communicate with their fellow divers. Similarly, a baseball coach uses kinesic signals to indicate a particular pitch or type of play, which is usually conveyed by an elaborate pattern of hand motions that involve touching the cap, chest, wrist, and other areas in a pattern known to the players.

Emblems, like all verbal messages, are symbols that have been selected by the members of a culture to convey some intended meaning, and their usage may change over time. For example, an emblem involving crossed fingers began as a way to indicate that one was a Christian, and later was a commonly used sign to ward off evil forces, and now is a generic emblem within predominantly Christian cultures to indicate "good luck."²⁶ The meanings of emblems are learned within a culture and, like verbal



The *wai* gesture is an emblem that is used throughout Thailand both as a greeting and to say good-bye.

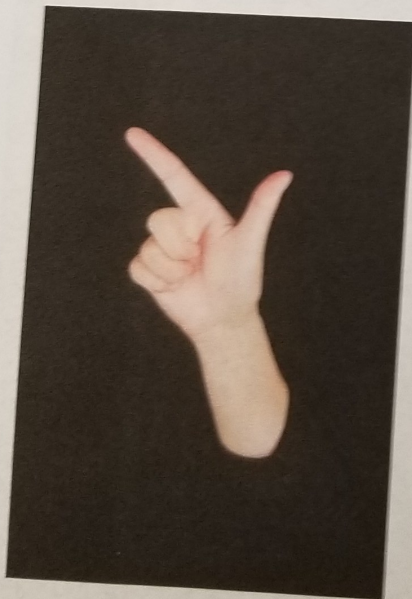
codes, are used consciously by the culture's members when they wish to convey specific ideas to others. Because emblems have to be learned to be understood, they are culture-specific.

Emblems can be a great source of misunderstanding in intercultural communication because the shared meanings for an emblem in one culture may be different in another. In many South Pacific islands, for instance, people raise their eyebrows to indicate "yes." Albanians and Bulgarians signal "yes" by shaking their heads from side to side, and they signal "no" by moving their heads up and down.²⁷ Similarly, in Turkey, to say "no" nonverbally, just

nod your head up and back, raising your eyebrows at the same time. Or just raise your eyebrows; that's "no." ...

By contrast, wagging your head from side to side doesn't mean "no" in Turkish; it means "I don't understand." So if a Turk asks you, "Are you looking for the bus to Ankara?" and you shake your head, he'll assume you don't understand English, and will probably ask you the same question again, this time in German.²⁸

Sometimes these mix-ups might be seen as humorous, such as the time a German student tried, unsuccessfully, to order a beer in a Canadian bar by gesturing with a raised thumb—the common German hand gesture for the number one—only to be met with indifference.²⁹ At other times, these misunderstandings can have serious consequences. A U.S. engineer, for example, unintentionally offended his German counterpart by giving the common U.S. gesture for "OK"—hand up, thumb and forefinger held in a circle—to indicate that he had done a good job. The German interpreted the gesture's meaning as a crude reference to a body orifice and walked off the job.³⁰



Can you guess what this hand gesture means? In China, it represents the number "eight" and is commonly used.



This Latino speaker gestures as he talks with his colleagues. These illustrators accompany his words and underscore the point he is making.

ILLUSTRATORS Illustrators are nonverbal behaviors that are directly tied to or accompany the verbal message. They are used to emphasize, explain, and support a word or phrase. They literally illustrate and provide a visual representation of the verbal message. In saying "the huge mountain," for example, you may simultaneously lift your arms and move them in a large half-circle. Similarly, you may point your index finger to emphasize an important idea or use hand motions to convey directions to a particular address. Unlike emblems, however, none of these gestures has meaning in itself. Rather, the meaning depends on the verbal message it underscores.

Illustrators are less arbitrary than emblems, which makes them more likely to be universally understood. But differences in both the rules for displaying illustrators and in the interpretations of them can be sources of intercultural misunderstanding. For example, calling for a person or a taxi while pointing an index finger is inappropriate in many Asian cultures, akin to calling a dog:

During his presidency, Bill Clinton travelled to China and, at one stop during the trip, spoke to university students in Beijing. President Clinton's remarks were generally well received and were followed by a lively question and answer session.

When interviewed for the American press, one student remarked, "During the question and answer period, I did not understand why the president pointed his finger at us to select a person. We would not use such a rude gesture." Puzzled, the American reporter asked the student what gesture the president should have used. The student answered using a sweep of the open hand—palm upward.³¹

Likewise, beckoning someone with the palm facing the body, fingers turned upward, can be offensive; Filipinos, Vietnamese, Mexicans, Pakistanis, and many

others regard this gesture as disrespectful, because it is used to call those who are inferior in status.³² Instead, the whole right hand is used, palm down, with the fingers together in a scooping motion toward the body. Similarly, punching the fist into the open palm as a display of strength may be misinterpreted as an obscene gesture whose meaning is similar to a Westerner's use of the middle finger extended from a closed fist.

AFFECT DISPLAYS Affect displays are facial and body movements that show feelings and emotions. Expressions of happiness or surprise, for instance, are displayed by the face and convey a person's inner feelings. Though affect displays are shown primarily through the face and eyes, postures and other body displays can also convey an emotional state.

Many affect displays may be universally recognized. The research of Paul Ekman and his colleagues indicates that, regardless of culture, the primary emotional states include happiness, sadness, anger, fear, surprise, disgust, contempt, and interest.³³ In addition to these primary affect displays, there are about 30 **affect blends**, combinations of the primary emotions.

Affect displays may be conscious and intentional, as when we purposely smile and look at another person to convey warmth and affection. Or affect displays may be unconscious and unintentional, such as a startled look of surprise, a blush of embarrassment, or dilated pupils due to pleasure or interest.

Culture Connections

Smelling another person's cheeks as a form of greeting is also used by the Arabs. To the Arab, to be able to smell a friend is reassuring. Smelling is a way of being involved with another, and to deny a friend his breath would be to act ashamed. In some rural Middle Eastern areas, when Arab intermediaries call to inspect a prospective bride for a relative, they sometimes ask to smell her. Their purpose is not to make sure that she is freshly scrubbed: apparently what they look for is any lingering odor of anger or discontent.

—A. J. Almany and A. J. Alwan

Cultural norms often govern both the kind and amount of affect displays shown. The Chinese, for instance, typically have lower frequency, intensity, and duration of affect displays than their European counterparts.³⁴ Particularly in high-context cultures, subtle changes in skin tonalities due to blushing, blanching, goose flesh, and related experiences may be carefully observed to learn what the other person may be feeling.

REGULATORS Regulators are nonverbal behaviors that help to synchronize the back-and-forth nature of conversations. This class of kinesic behaviors helps to control the flow and sequencing of communication and may include head nods, eye contact, postural shifts, back-channel signals (such as "Uh-huhm" or "Mmm-mmm"), and other turn-taking cues.

Regulators are used by speakers to indicate whether others should take a turn and by listeners to indicate whether they wish to speak or would prefer to continue listening. They also convey information about the preferred speed or pacing of conversations and the degree to which the other person is understood and believed.

Regardless of culture, taking turns is required in all conversations. Thus, for interpersonal communication to occur, talk sequences must be highly coordinated. Regulators are those subtle cues that allow people to maintain this high degree of coordination.

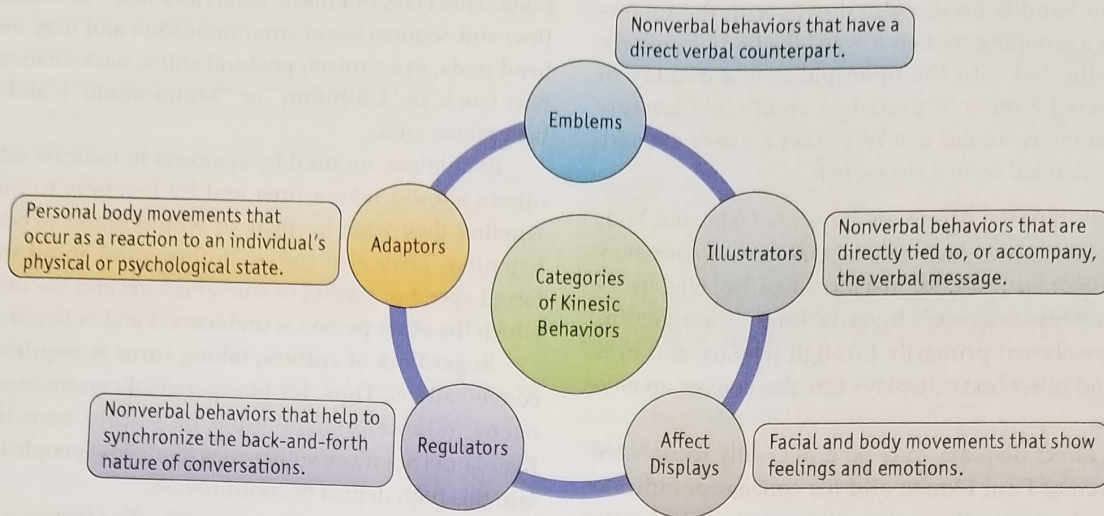
Regulators are culture-specific. For instance, people from high-context cultures such as Korea and Japan are especially concerned with meanings conveyed by the eyes. In an interesting study comparing the looking behaviors of African Americans and European Americans in a conversation, Marianne LaFrance and Clara Mayo found that there were many differences in the interpretations of turn-taking cues. European Americans tend to look directly into the eyes of the other person when they are the listeners, whereas African Americans prefer to look away. Unfortunately, to African Americans, such behaviors by European Americans may be regarded as invasive or confrontational when interest and involvement are intended instead. Conversely, the behaviors of African Americans could be regarded by European Americans as a sign of indifference or inattention when respect is intended. LaFrance and Mayo also found that when African American speakers pause while simultaneously looking directly at their European American listeners, the listeners often interpret this as a signal to speak, only to find that the African American person is also speaking.³⁵

ADAPTORS Adaptors are personal body movements that occur as a reaction to an individual's physical or psychological state. Scratching an itch, fidgeting, tapping a pencil, and smoothing one's hair are all behaviors that fulfill some individualized need.

Adaptors are usually performed unintentionally, mindlessly, and without conscious awareness. They seem to be more frequent under conditions of stress, impatience, enthusiasm, excitement, or nervousness, and they are often interpreted by others as a sign of discomfort, uneasiness, agitation, irritation, or other negative feelings.

See Figure 8.3 to review how adaptors are distinct from other types of body movements.

Figure 8.3 Review: Body Movements



8.4.4: Personal Space

OBJECTIVE: Describe how the use of personal space and territory can communicate specific meanings

The use of space functions as an important communication system in all cultures. Cultures are organized in some spatial pattern, and that pattern can reveal the character of the people in that culture. Two important features of the way cultures use the space around them are the different needs for **personal space** and the messages that are used to indicate territoriality. An understanding of how cultures use personal space is important in building intercultural competence.

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN THE USE OF PERSONAL SPACE Wherever you go, whatever you do, you are surrounded at all moments by a personal space “bubble.” Edward Hall coined the term **proxemics** to refer to the study of how people differ in their use of personal space.

Personal space distances are culture-specific.³⁶ People from colder climates, for instance, typically use large physical distances when they communicate, whereas those from warm-weather climates prefer close distances. The personal space bubbles for Northern Europeans are therefore large, and people expect others to keep their distance. The personal space bubbles for Europeans get smaller and smaller, however, as one travels south toward the Mediterranean. Indeed, the distance that is regarded as intimate in Germany, Scandinavia, and England overlaps with what is regarded as a normal conversational distance in France and the Mediterranean countries of Italy, Greece, and Spain. Thus, when an Italian and a Norwegian attempt to have a simple informal conversation, the Italian tries to

move closer—into his comfort zone for such conversations—whereas the Norwegian continually tries to move backward in an attempt to maintain the “correct” conversational distance. The resulting interaction, which might look like a slow-motion dance across the room, could be comical except that it results in negative evaluations on both sides; the Norwegian thinks his Southern European counterpart is “too close for comfort,” whereas the Italian regards his Northern European neighbor as “too distant and aloof.”

The habitual use of the culturally proper spacing distance is accompanied by a predictable level and kind of sensory information. For example, if the standard cultural spacing distance in a personal conversation with an acquaintance is about three feet, people will become accustomed to the sights, sounds, and smells of others that are usually acquired at that distance. For someone who is accustomed to a larger spacing distance, at three feet, the voices will sound too loud, it might be possible to smell the other person’s breath, the other person will seem too close and perhaps out of the “normal” focal range, and the habitual ways of holding the body may no longer work. In this situation, the culturally learned cues that are so helpful within one’s culture can become a hindrance. One European American student, for instance, in commenting on a party that was attended by many Italians and Spaniards, exclaimed, “They would stand close enough that I could almost feel the air coming from their mouths.” Similar reactions to intercultural encounters are common. As Edward and Mildred Hall have suggested,

Since most people don’t think about personal distance as something that is culturally patterned, foreign spatial cues are almost inevitably misinterpreted. This can lead

to bad feelings which are then projected onto the people from the other culture in a most personal way. When a foreigner appears aggressive and pushy, or remote and cold, it may mean only that her or his personal distance is different from yours.³⁷

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN TERRITORIALITY Do you have a favorite chair or classroom seat that you think “belongs” to you? Or do you have a room, or perhaps just a portion of a room, that you consider to be off limits to others? The need to protect and defend a particular spatial area is known as **territoriality**, a set of behaviors that people display to show that they “own” or have the right to control the use of a particular geographic area.

People mark their territories in a variety of ways. It can be done formally using actual barriers such as fences and signs that say “No Trespassing” or “Keep Off the Grass.” Territories can also be marked informally by

nonverbal markers such as clothing, books, and other personal items that indicate a person’s intent to control or occupy a given area.

WRITING PROMPT

Your Insights on Territoriality

Reflect on the ways in which you are territorial in different contexts. Describe some examples of ways in which you are territorial in your work space, home space, or in certain social settings. Why do you think we are often territorial about our space? Explain your reasoning, and discuss how territoriality may impede intercultural interaction.

The response entered here will appear in the performance dashboard and can be viewed by your instructor.

Submit

Three Ways of Exhibiting Cultural Differences in Territoriality

Cultural differences in territoriality can be exhibited in three ways.³⁸

Interactive

Degree of Territoriality

First, cultures can differ in the general degree of territoriality that its members tend to exhibit. Some cultures are far more territorial than others. For instance, as Hall and Hall point out in their comparison of Germans and French:

People like the Germans are highly territorial; they barricade themselves behind heavy doors and soundproof walls to try to seal themselves from others in order to concentrate on their work. The French have a close personal distance and are not as territorial. They are tied to people and thrive on constant interaction and high-information flow to provide them the context they need.

Range of Possible Places or Spaces

Response to Invasions of Territory

8.4.5: Touch

OBJECTIVE: Explain how touch can be used to communicate nonverbally

Touch is probably the most basic component of human communication. It is experienced long before we are able to see and speak, and it is a fundamental part of the human experience. Touch can carry many meanings and be used for practical purposes or to convey deeply felt emotion. However, these meanings are not necessarily the same from one culture to another.

THE MEANINGS OF TOUCH Stanley E. Jones and A. Elaine Yarbrough have identified five meanings of touch that are important in understanding the nature of intercultural communication.³⁹ Touch is often used to indicate affect, the expression of positive and negative feelings and emotions. Protection, reassurance, support, hatred, dislike, and disapproval are all conveyed through touch; hugging, stroking, kissing, slapping, hitting, and kicking are all ways in which these messages can be conveyed. Touch is also used as a sign of playfulness. Whether affectionately or aggressively, touch can be used to signal that the other's behavior should not be taken seriously. Touch is frequently used as a means of control. "Stay here," "Move over," and similar messages are communicated through touch. Touching for control may also indicate social dominance. High-status individuals in most Western countries, for instance, are more likely to touch than to be touched, whereas low-status individuals are likely to receive touching behaviors from their superiors.⁴⁰ Touching for ritual purposes occurs mainly on occasions involving introductions or departures. Shaking hands, clasping shoulders, hugging, and kissing the cheeks or lips are all forms of greeting rituals. Touching is also used in task-related activities. These touches may be as casual as a brief contact of hands when passing an object, or they may be as formal and prolonged as a physician taking a pulse at the wrist or neck.

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN TOUCH Cultures differ in the overall amount of touching they prefer. People from high-contact cultures, such as those in the Middle East, Latin America, and Southern Europe, touch each other in social conversations much more than do people from non-contact cultures such as Asia and Northern Europe. These cultural differences can lead to difficulties in intercultural communication. Germans, Scandinavians, and Japanese, for example, may be perceived as cold and aloof by Brazilians and Italians, who in turn may be regarded as aggressive, pushy, and overly familiar by Northern Europeans. As Edward and Mildred Hall have noted, "In northern Europe one does not touch others. Even the brushing of the overcoat sleeve used to elicit an apology."⁴¹ A comparable difference was observed by Dean Barnlund, who found

that U.S. American students reported being touched twice as much as did Japanese students.⁴²

WRITING PROMPT

Cultural Differences in Touch

Describe your culture's expectations about touch. What do touching behaviors mean in your culture? Who can touch whom, and where? Explain whether there are differences related to "public" settings such as a supermarket and "private" settings such as a gathering in someone's home. Then summarize whether touching within your culture tends to be more restrictive or more permissive, and for whom.

The response entered here will appear in the performance dashboard and can be viewed by your instructor.

Submit

8.4.6: Voice

OBJECTIVE: Describe how nonverbal messages are communicated through vocal quality and vocalics

Nonverbal messages are often used to accent or underscore the verbal message by adding emphasis to particular words or phrases. Indeed, the many qualities of the voice itself, in addition to the actual meaning of the words, form the vocalic nonverbal communication system. **Vocalics** also include many nonspeech sounds, such as belching, laughing, and crying, and vocal "filler" sounds, such as *uh*, *er*, *um*, and *uh-huh*. Differences in these vocal qualities can vary greatly among different cultures.

VOCAL VERSUS VERBAL COMMUNICATION Vocalic qualities include pitch (high to low), rate of talking (fast to slow), conversational rhythm (smooth to staccato), and volume (loud to soft). Because spoken (that is, verbal) language always has some vocal elements, it is difficult to separate the meaning conveyed by the language from that conveyed by the vocalic components. However, if you can imagine that these words you are now reading are a transcript of a lecture we have given, you will be able to understand clearly the distinctions we are describing. Although our words—the language spoken—are here on the printed page, the vocalics are not. Are we speaking rapidly or slowly? How does our inflection change to emphasize a point or to signal a question? Are we yelling, whispering, drawling, or speaking with an accent? Do our voices indicate that we are tense, relaxed, strained, calm, bored, or excited? The answers to these types of questions are conveyed by the speaker's voice.

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN VOCAL COMMUNICATION There are vast cultural differences in vocalic behaviors. For example, unlike English, many Asian languages are

Use of Touch Varies by Culture

Cultural differences in touch, including where people can touch,⁴³ how people touch,⁴⁴ who touches whom, and the settings where touch occurs, can lead to difficulties in intercultural communication.

Interactive**Where People Can Touch**

Cultures differ in where people can be touched. In Thailand and Malaysia, for instance, the head should not be touched because it is considered sacred and the locus of a person's spiritual and intellectual powers. In the United States, the head is far more likely to be touched.

How People Touch**Who Touches Whom****Settings or Occasions**

tonal. The same Chinese words when said with a different vocalic tone or pitch can have vastly different meanings. In addition to differences in tone or pitch, there are large cultural differences in the loudness and frequency of speaking. Latinos, for instance, perceive themselves as talking more loudly and more frequently than European Americans.⁴⁵

The emotional meanings conveyed by the voice are usually taken for granted by native language users, but they can be the cause of considerable problems when they fail to conform to preconceived expectations. For instance, when a Saudi Arabian man is speaking in English, he will usually transfer his native intonation patterns without necessarily being aware that he has done so. In Arabic, the intonation pattern is such that many of the individual words in the sentence are stressed. Although a flat intonation pattern is used in declarative sentences, the intonation pattern for exclamatory sentences is much stronger and more emotional than

that in English. The higher pitch of Arabic speakers also conveys a more emotional tone than that of English speakers. Consequently, differences in vocal characteristics may result in unwarranted negative impressions. The U.S. American may incorrectly perceive that the Saudi Arabian is excited or angry when in fact he is not. Questions by the Saudi that merely seek information may sound accusing. The monotonous tone of declarative sentences may be perceived as demonstrating apathy or a lack of interest. Vocal stress and intonation differences may be perceived as aggressive or abrasive when only polite conversation is intended. Conversely, the Saudi Arabian may incorrectly interpret certain behaviors of the U.S. American speaker as an expression of calmness and pleasantness when anger or annoyance is being conveyed. Similarly, a statement that seems to be a firm assertion to the U.S. American speaker may sound weak and doubtful to the Saudi Arabian.⁴⁶

8.4.7: Time

OBJECTIVE: Summarize how the varying use of time among cultures affects intercultural communication

As you might expect, cultures vary widely in how they interact with time. The study of time—how people use it, structure it, interpret it, and understand its passage—is called **chronemics**. We consider chronemics from two perspectives: time orientations and time systems.

TIME ORIENTATIONS **Time orientation** refers to the value or importance the members of a culture place on the passage of time. Communication is a process, which means that people's behaviors must be understood as part of an ongoing stream of events that changes over a period of time. Members of a culture share a similar worldview

Cultures' Orientations to Time

Some cultures are predominantly past oriented,⁴⁷ others are present oriented, and still others prefer a future-oriented worldview. As we briefly review these cultural orientations about time, take note of the amazing degree of interrelationship—in this case, the link between a culture's nonverbal code system and its cultural patterns—that characterizes the various aspects of a culture.

about the nature of time. Different cultures can have different conceptions and values about the appropriate ways to comprehend events and experiences.

WRITING PROMPT

Your Culture's Time Orientation

Reflect on the culture in which you were born. Explain which orientation to time best characterizes your culture (past oriented, present oriented, or future oriented). Why do you think your culture best fits that specific time orientation? Also, describe what it would be like to be in a culture with a different orientation to time.

▶ The response entered here will appear in the performance dashboard and can be viewed by your instructor.

Submit

Past-Oriented Cultures

Past-oriented cultures regard previous experiences and events as most important. These cultures place a primary emphasis on tradition and the wisdom passed down from older generations. Consequently, they show a great deal of deference and respect for parents and other elders who are the links to these past sources of knowledge. Events are circular, since important patterns perpetually recur in the present; therefore, tried-and-true methods for overcoming obstacles and dealing with problems can be applied to current difficulties. Many aspects of the British, Chinese, and Native American experiences, for instance, can be understood only by reference to their reverence for traditions, past family experiences, or tribal customs. Consider this example of a past-oriented culture, the Samburu, a nomadic tribe from northern Kenya, that reveres its elders:

The elders are an invaluable source of essential knowledge, and in an environment that by its very nature allows only a narrow margin for error, the oldest survivors must possess the most valuable knowledge of all. The elders know their environment intimately—every lie and twist of it. The land, the water, the vegetation; trees, shrubs, herbs—nutritious, medicinal, poisonous. They know each cow, and have a host of specific names for the distinctive shape and skin patterns of each animal in just the same way that Europeans distinguish within the general term flower, or tree.

Present-Oriented Cultures

Future-Oriented Cultures

Three Types of Time Systems

There are three types of time systems: technical, formal,⁴⁸ and informal.⁴⁹

Interactive

Technical Time Systems

Technical time systems are the precise, scientific measurements of time that are calculated in such units as nanoseconds. Typically, members of a culture do not use technical time systems because they are most applicable to specialized settings like the research laboratory. Consequently, technical time systems are of little relevance to the common experiences that members of a culture share.

Formal Time Systems

Informal Time Systems

TIME SYSTEMS **Time systems** are the implicit cultural rules that are used to arrange sets of experiences in some meaningful way.

MONOCHRONIC OR POLYCHRONIC Perhaps the most important aspect of the culture's informal time system is the degree to which it is monochronic or polychronic.⁵⁰

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN PERCEPTIONS AND USE OF TIME Cultures differ in their time orientations and in the time systems they use to give order to experiences. Misunderstandings can occur between people who have different time orientations. For instance, someone from a present-oriented culture might view people from past-oriented cultures as too tied to tradition and people from future-oriented cultures as passionless slaves to efficiency and materialism. Alternatively, someone from a future-oriented culture might view those from present-oriented cultures as self-centered, hedonistic, inefficient, and foolish.⁵¹

This natural tendency to view one's own practices as superior to all others is a common source of problems in intercultural communication.

Cultures also differ in the formal and informal time systems they use to determine how long an event should take, and even how long "long" is. Misinterpretations often occur when individuals from monochronic and polychronic cultures attempt to interact. Each usually views the other's responses to time "commitments" as disrespectful and unfriendly. Interculturally competent individuals, however, are typically aware of the time systems they are using to regulate their behaviors, and they are able to adapt their time orientations to the prevailing social and situational constraints. For example, participants at a board meeting of a Puerto Rican community center used European American references to time when they were focused on their work but employed "Puerto Rican time" when the goal was socializing.⁵² Similarly, in some

Important Aspect of the Culture's Informal Time System

Learn about monochronic⁵³ and polychronic time systems with the following information.

Interactive

Monochronic Time System

A **monochronic time system** means that things should be done one at a time, and time is segmented into precise, small units. In a monochronic time system, time is viewed as a commodity; it is scheduled, managed, and arranged. European Americans, like members of other monochronic cultures, are very time-driven. Similarly, within Swiss-German culture, people will often interpret tardiness as a personal insult. The ubiquitous calendar or scheduler that many people carry, which tells them when, where, and with whom to engage in activities, is an apt symbol of a monochronic culture. An event is regarded as separate and distinct from all others and should receive the exclusive focus of attention it deserves. These events also have limits or boundaries so that there are expected beginning and ending points that have been scheduled in advance. Thus people from monochronic cultures find it disconcerting to enter an office overseas with an appointment only to discover that other matters require the attention of the man they are to meet. The ideal is to center the attention first on one thing and then move on to something else.

Polychronic Time System

intercultural situations, the name of a culture will be added after a meeting time to designate if the time is to be regarded as fixed or flexible.⁵⁴

WRITING PROMPT**Lived Differences in Perceptions and Use of Time**

Identify a time in which you and another person had a different perception of time that was due to a cultural difference. What happened? How did this difference in perception affect the interaction you had with that other person? Explain why you think cultural misunderstandings occur in relation to time orientation and what can be done to prevent such misunderstandings.

▶ The response entered here will appear in the performance dashboard and can be viewed by your instructor.

Submit

8.5: Synchrony of Nonverbal Communication Codes

Cultures train their members to synchronize various nonverbal behaviors to form a response pattern according to the expected behaviors in that culture. Subtle variations in the response patterns are clearly noticed, even when they differ by only a few thousandths of a second. William Condon, who describes himself as "a white, middle-class male," suggests that interactional synchrony is learned from birth and occurs within a fraction of a second. Condon compares the differences in the speech and gestures of African Americans and European Americans:

If I say the word "because" both my hands may extend exactly together. In Black behavior, however, the right

Review: Time Systems

Check your understanding of time systems by completing the following exercise.

Interactive

1. In a [] time system, time is viewed as a commodity; it is scheduled, managed, and arranged.
2. A [] time system means that several things are being done at the same time.
3. The [] time systems refer to the assumptions cultures make about how time should be used or experienced.
4. The [] time systems refer to the ways in which the members of a culture describe and comprehend units of time.
5. The [] time systems are the precise, scientific measurements of time that are calculated in such units as nanoseconds.

WORD BANK

- technical
- monochronic
- formal
- polychronic
- informal

hand may begin to extend with the "be" portion slightly ahead of the left hand and the left hand will extend rapidly across the "cause" portion. This creates the syncopation, mentioned before, which can appear anywhere in the body. A person moves in the rhythm and timing of his or her culture, and this rhythm is in the whole body... It may be that those having different cultural rhythms are unable to really "synch-in" fully with each other... I think that infants from the first moments of life and even in the womb are getting the rhythm and structure and style of sound, the rhythms of their culture, so that they imprint to them and the rhythms become part of their very being.⁵⁵



By the end of this module, you will be able to:

- 8.5.1: Explain how sensitivity to behavioral synchrony can improve intercultural communication**

8.5.1: Behavioral Synchrony

OBJECTIVE: Explain how sensitivity to behavioral synchrony can improve intercultural communication

Behavioral synchrony in the use of nonverbal codes can be found in virtually all cultures. Not only must an individual's many behaviors be coordinated appropriately, they must also mesh properly with the words and movements of the other interactants. Coordination in Japanese bowing behaviors, for example, requires an adaptation to the status relationships of the participants; the inferior must begin the bow, and the superior decides when the bow is complete. If the participants are of equal status, they must begin and end their bows simultaneously. This is not as easy as it seems. As one Japanese man relates:

Perfect synchrony is absolutely essential to bowing. Whenever an American tries to bow to me, I often feel

extremely awkward and uncomfortable because I simply cannot synchronize bowing with him or her ... bowing occurs in a flash of a second, before you have time to think. And both parties must know precisely when to start bowing, how deep, how long to stay in the bowed position, and when to bring their heads up.⁵⁶

Similar degrees of coordination and synchrony can be found in most everyday activities. Sensitivity to these different nonverbal codes can help you become more intercultural competent.

WRITING PROMPT

Your View of Behavioral Synchrony

Think about why behavioral synchrony may be important for some cultures (syncing up nonverbal gestures and verbal codes). Explain why such synchrony may be so important. How may this synchrony affect—or even intimidate—individuals who are not part of the cultures using these nonverbal behaviors?

▶ The response entered here will appear in the performance dashboard and can be viewed by your instructor.

Submit

8.6: Nonverbal Communication and Intercultural Competence

Nonverbal codes are important to an understanding of intercultural communication because virtually everything we say, do, create, and wear can communicate messages about our culture and ourselves. Indeed, as Peter A. Andersen suggests, “One of the most basic and obvious functions of nonverbal communication is to communicate one’s culture.”⁵⁷

The rules and norms that govern most nonverbal communication behaviors are both culture-specific and outside of conscious awareness. That is, although members of a culture know and follow their culture’s expectations, they probably learned the norms for proper nonverbal expressiveness very early in childhood, and these norms may never have been articulated verbally.⁵⁸ Sometimes, therefore, the only way you will know that a cultural norm exists is when you break it!

An important consequence of this out-of-awareness aspect is that members of a culture use their norms to determine appropriate nonverbal behaviors and then make negative judgments about others’ feelings, motives, intentions, and even their attractiveness if these norms are violated.⁵⁹ Often, the violations will be inaccurately attributed to aspects of personality, attitudes, or intelligence rather than to a mismatch between learned nonverbal codes. U.S.

Americans, for instance, highly value positive nonverbal displays and typically regard someone who smiles as more intelligent than someone who does not; the Japanese, however, whose cultural norms value constraint in nonverbal expressiveness, do not equate expressiveness with intelligence.⁶⁰ The very nature of nonverbal behaviors makes inaccurate judgments difficult to recognize and correct.

✓ By the end of this module, you will be able to:

8.6.1: Summarize steps that can be taken to improve intercultural competence in nonverbal communication

8.6.1: Improving Intercultural Competence in Nonverbal Communication

OBJECTIVE: Summarize steps that can be taken to improve intercultural competence in nonverbal communication

Researchers have been known to take weeks or even months to analyze the delicate interaction rhythms involved in a single conversation. Of course, most people do not have the luxury of a month to analyze someone’s comments before responding. However, the knowledge that the patterns of behavior will probably be very complex will help sensitize you to them and may encourage you to notice more details.

No set of behaviors is universally correct, so the “right” behaviors can never be described in a catalog or list. Rather, the proper behaviors are those that are appropriate and effective in the context of the culture, setting, and occasion. What is right in one set of circumstances may be totally wrong in another. Although it is useful to gather culture-specific information about appropriate nonverbal behaviors, even this knowledge should be approached as relative because prescriptions of “right” behavior rarely identify all of the situational characteristics that cultural natives “know.”

WRITING PROMPT

Setting Goals for Future Intercultural Interactions

Consider your nonverbal intercultural competence. What might you do to improve your knowledge, motivations, and skills? What could you do differently in observing and evaluating cultural differences in nonverbal communication? Identify one to three goals for improving your intercultural competence in your nonverbal communication.

▶ The response entered here will appear in the performance dashboard and can be viewed by your instructor.

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How to Improve Intercultural Competence in Nonverbal Communication

The following suggestions will help you use your knowledge of nonverbal communication to improve your intercultural competence. These suggestions are designed to help you notice, interpret, and use nonverbal communication behaviors to function more appropriately and more effectively in intercultural encounters.

Interactive**By Monitoring Your Emotional Reactions****By Skillful Interpretation**

Skillful interpretation includes observation of general tendencies. Focus on what members of the other culture prefer and the ways in which they typically behave. How, when, and with whom do they gesture, move, look, and touch? How are time and space used to define and maintain social relationships? It is much harder to pay attention to these general tendencies than you might think because, in all likelihood, you have not had much practice in consciously looking for patterns in the commonplace, taken-for-granted activities through which cultural effects are displayed. Nevertheless, it is possible, with practice, to improve your observation skills.

By Avoiding Premature Interpretation**By Practicing to Improve Your Ability**

Summary: Nonverbal Intercultural Communication

Certain nonverbal communication tendencies are universal to all humans.

- Examples of this include shrugging the shoulders and certain hand gestures and facial expressions.

Cultures vary greatly in the repertoire of behaviors and circumstances in which nonverbal exchanges occur.

- A smile, a head nod, and eye contact may all have different meanings in different cultures.

Nonverbal code systems are vital to effective intercultural communication.

- The "silent language" of communication, nonverbal code systems are less precise and less consciously used

and interpreted than verbal code systems, but they can have powerful effects on perceptions of and interpretations about others.

- Nonverbal code systems serve five functions: providing information, managing impressions, expressing emotion, regulating interactions, and conveying relationship messages.

Nonverbal code systems occur in various channels:

- Physical appearance: body characteristics, hair, clothing, makeup, jewelry
- Environment: formality, warmth, privacy, familiarity, constraint, distance